

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L JAKARTA 16920

E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT: MORE RESPONSE TO ABRI STATEMENT

REF: A) JAKARTA 16822, B) JAKARTA 16844

1. SUMMARY: AMIDST THE OTHERWISE PREDICTABLE RESPONSE TO THE DECEMBER 15 AND ARMED FORCES (ABRI) STATEMENT AGAINST ILLEGAL DISSIDENCE, EAST JAVA MILITARY COMMANDER WITARMIN REPORTEDLY CONFIRMED THE EXISTENCE OF "SENIOR ABRI" WHO SUPPORT THE "OVERTHROW OF SUHARTO". WITARMIN'S STATEMENT, IF ACCURATELY QUOTED, IS THE FIRST PUBLIC CONFIRMATION BY A SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL OF HIGH-LEVEL OPPOSITION TO SUHARTO. AT A MINIMUM, THE WITARMIN STATEMENT WILL HEAT UP THE POLITICAL SITUATION EVEN MORE. END SUMMARY.

2. PUBLIC AND PRIVATE RESPONSE TO THE DECEMBER 15 ABRI STATEMENT AIMED AT DEMONSTRATING THE UNITY OF THE ARMED FORCES AND DISCOURAGING DISSIDENT ACTIVITY (REFTELS) CONTINUES ALONG LARGELY PREDICTABLE LINES. PRESIDENT SUHARTO, IN A LONG-SCHEDULED SPEECH AT THE INDONESIAN MILITARY ACADEMY'S GRADUATION CEREMONY, TERMED THE ABRI STATEMENT A "BROTHERLY WARNING" TO THE CITIZENS OF INDONESIA TO CHANNEL THEIR
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CRITICISM THROUGH LEGAL INSTITUTIONS AND TO AVOID "SPLITTING THE UNITY OF THE NATION". THE PRESIDENT DENIED THE MILITARY IS "THIRSTY FOR POWER," BUT SAID THE ARMED FORCES MUST MOVE DECISIVELY TO STOP THE "INCREASINGLY DANGEROUS DRIFT TOWARD DISORDER."

3. RETIRED GEN. NASUTION, REPORTEDLY ONE OF THE TARGETS

OF THE ABRI STATEMENT, ANNOUNCED HE WAS "HAPPY" THAT IT WAS ISSUED, SINCE IT IS "ALMOST EXACTLY THE SAME AS A STATEMENT THAT I DRAFTED AND WE ALL SIGNED IN 1966." NOT PULLING HIS PUNCHES IN A SPEECH TO A JAKARTA UNIVERSITY AUDIENCE, NASUTION NOTED THE CURRENT CRISIS, "CANNOT BE SETTLED BY SIGNING STATEMENTS BUT BY ADHERING TO THE PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY." THE MILITARY, HE SAID, HAD BEEN ARMED TO DEFEND THE PEOPLE, NOT TO SUPPRESS THEM OR TO SUPPORT "ANY ONE MAN."

4. MEANWHILE, THE COMBINED STUDENT COUNCILS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF INDONESIA (UI), THE BANDUNG INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY (ITB) AND THE BOGOR AGRICULTURAL INSTITUTE (IPB) ISSUED A JOINT STATEMENT DENYING THAT STUDENTS HAVE ANY POLITICAL AIMS OR WANT TO TOPPLE THE PRESIDENT BUT PLEDGING TO CONTINUE TO "CRYSTALLIZE THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE PEOPLE." THE STUDENTS, PROCLAIMS THE STATEMENT, REGARD "ABRI AS OUR PARTNER" IN SEEKING THE SUCCESS OF THE MPR. THE STATEMENT NOTES, HOWEVER, THAT SUCCESS ISN'T THE SAME AS STATIC STABILITY. THE STATEMENT CONCLUDES BY CALLING FOR A "DIRECT DIALOGUE" WITH THE ABRI LEADERSHIP, A PROPOSAL STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES UNSUCCESSFULLY TRIED TO IMPLEMENT BY UNEXPECTEDLY CALLING ON ARMED FORCES COMMANDER GEN. PANGGABEAN ON DECEMBER 17. WITHOUT AN APPOINTMENT, THE STUDENTS WERE NOT PERMITTED TO TALK WITH PANGGABEAN BUT DID SPEAK WITH SEVERAL OF HIS STAFF AND WERE PROMISED A LATER MEETING WITH
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THE GENERAL.

5. THE MOST STARTLING AND POTENTIALLY SIGNIFICANT RESPONSE SO FAR TO THE ABRI STATEMENT, HOWEVER, CAME FROM EAST JAVA, WHERE REGIONAL MILITARY COMMANDER MAJ. GEN. WITARMIN REPORTEDLY TOLD A LARGE AUDIENCE ON DECEMBER 17 THAT "THERE ARE SENIOR ABRI WHO AT THE LEAST JOIN IN SUPPORTING THE OVERTHROW OF THE PRESIDENT." WITARMIN ADDED THAT THE IDENTITY OF THESE MILITARY LEADERS WAS KNOWN AND "THEY HAVE ALREADY BEEN BLACK-LISTED." THEY ARE ACTING, CLAIMED WITARMIN, IN SUPPORT OF "PUBLIC FIGURES WHO HAVE AMBITIONS TO BECOME PRESIDENT." WITARMIN CHARACTERIZED THE ENTIRE EFFORT TO REPLACE THE PRESIDENT AS "DISHEARTENING" AND "UNCONSTITUTIONAL," AND PROMISED THAT THE ARMED FORCES WILL BE ALERT TO PREVENT A "REOCCURRENCE OF THE CROCODILE HOLE INCIDENT," A REFERENCE TO THE MASS BURIAL OF THE SEVEN SENIOR MILITARY GESTAPU VICTIMS IN A WELL CALLED THE CROCODILE HOLE.

6. COMMENT. WITARMIN'S STATEMENT, IF ACCURATELY QUOTED (ITS IS CARRIED IN SEVERAL PAPERS), IS THE FIRST CONFIRMATION BY A SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL OF OFT-RUMORED OPPOSITION

TO SUHARTO AMONG THE TOP RANKS OF ABRI. EVEN IF ACCURATELY
QUOTED, HOWEVER, WITARMIN'S STATEMENT DOES NOT BY ITSELF
PROVE THE EXISTENCE OF AN ANTI-SUHARTO CABAL. FOR ONE THING,
IT CONTRADICTS WITARMIN'S OWN CLAIM OF SEVERAL DAYS AGO
THAT "ABRI IS UNITED" (REF B). IT IS NOT INCONCEIVABLE
THAT WITARMIN IS TRYING TO DISCREDIT AN ABRI RIVAL (IN
RSPONSE TO A PRESS QUERY, WITARMIN DENIED HE WAS REFERRING
TO ABRI VICE-COMMANDER SURONO) OR THAT HE IS TRYING TO
PUBLICIZE HIS OWN LOYALTY TO SUHARTO. WE HAVE AS YET
FOUND NO SUBSTANTIAL EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT WITARMIN'S
CLAIM. AT A MINIMUM, HOWEVER, THE WITARMIN STATEMENT WILL
HEAT UP THE ALREADY TENSE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT AND MAY
SPARK NEW RUMORS AND INTRIGUE AGAINST SUHARTO AND HIS
GOVERNMENT.
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